

Editorial Board, *The Daily Campus* (University of Connecticut)

The Senate approved the *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act*, a bill introduced by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine). All it needs to become legislation is to be passed by the House, which they should do as soon as possible. The bill's goal is to eliminate child marriage in several ways: by empowering girls and promoting community understanding about the consequences of child marriage, as well as mandating the U.S. government to create a strategy to prevent child marriage. It will provide necessary funds for five years to assist programs for child marriage prevention in countries that have a high rate of child marriage. This would authorize programs to provide educational and economic opportunities for girls in these countries. Passing this bill would speak volumes about the United States commitment to global gender equality.

According to the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) website, girls who are 14 years old and younger face more frequent and more dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth due to their underdeveloped bodies. They are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women between the ages of 20 and 24. Child brides face immense pressure to bear children upon marriage, which can often endanger their lives. Although there are laws prohibiting marriage for girls under the age of 18, they only apply to children marrying without their parents' consent. The marriages being performed right now are usually within the law, but they should cease to be considered legal.

This bill hopes to promote the idea of freewill for girls, who, hopefully with assistance, will not have to enter marriages during childhood without full, informed consent. It also aims to promote sexual and reproductive health so that girls would not enter marriage with little idea about sexuality and reproduction. This would hopefully lower the rates of infection and death among young women and girls who enter marriages as children.

While these are estimable goals, it is important for the U.S. to remember that it is easier to pass a feel-good act than it is to always act upon it. In addition, we should remember to work within cultures and educate not just the girls, but the ones who force them to marry. To truly play a role in eliminating child marriage, the U.S. must be willing to commit long-term, even when the initial five years pass.